

Historical Note on a Collection of Official Correspondence from the Sikh Era

A unique collection of correspondence and other official record concerning Gakkhars from the Sikh era has come to light recently [1, 2]. This collection was compiled and transcribed in 1935 from the original documents by Raja Kifayat Ali Khan (1893-1957), who belonged to the village Jandot [3]. This village is part of the Sohawa tehsil of the Jhelum district. Raja Kifayat Ali Khan's family members associated themselves with the Sikhs from the early years of the rise of the Sikh power in Pothohar and remained trusted local administrators of the Sikhs for many generations. Raja Kifayat Ali's great grandfather Chaudhary Shahbaz Khan was the revenue collector (Kardar) of Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala's estates located in the Pabbi area of the erstwhile parganah of Dangali specifically and the Pothohar region at large [4, 5]. Sardar Chattar Singh (d. 1855) rose to prominence during the brief reign of Maharaja Duleep Singh (1838-1893) and served as the provincial governor of Peshawar and later Hazara. He and his son Sardar Sher Singh (d. 1858) fought against the British during the second Anglo-Sikh war. After the dissolution of the Sikh empire, Sardar Chattar Singh was deprived of his estates and imprisoned for the rest of his life away from the Punjab.

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The aforementioned collection of documents was put together on the request of Raja Muhammad Aslam Khan (1907-1954), who belonged to the village Bakrala [3, 6]. This village is also situated in the Sohawa tehsil of the Jhelum district. Raja Kifayat Ali and Raja Muhammad Aslam had a shared interest in the history of Pothohar and its people. They frequently communicated and wrote articles for local and national periodicals of the time, highlighting significant aspects of the history of Pothohar. Raja Kifayat Ali Khan was mindful of the historical significance of the official and revenue record that was maintained by his ancestors while being in service of the Sikhs and he carefully preserved it during his lifetime.

The collection of documents being presented in this historical note is in the form of a notebook. This notebook remained in the custody of Raja Muhammad Aslam Khan and after his death was passed on to his brother Raja Muhammad Ashraf Khan and later his nephew Raja Zafar-ul-Haq. The notebook has been divided into two parts. The first part has 68 different documents concerning Gakkhars that were all transcribed by Raja Kifayat Ali Khan [1]. The majority of these documents were transcribed from the originals that Raja Kifayat Ali had in his collection while a few items were transcribed from the documents owned by other people. Raja Kifayat Ali Khan has added explanatory notes to clarify the contents of certain documents or to provide a context based on his knowledge of the local history. A summary of the first part of the notebook has been included in the following table:

Type	Number of Items	Remarks
Correspondence	62	
Receipts	02	
Court Order (Robkar)	01	From the early years of the British rule.
Application	01	
Agreement (Iqrarnama)	01	
Miscellaneous	01	Record of troops on a regional campaign.

In the second part of the notebook, 71 documents have been included [2]. The documents presented in this part have been transcribed by both Raja Kifayat Ali Khan and Raja Muhammad Aslam Khan. In the second part, the majority of documents are related to the village Bakralla and its residents. Towards the end of the second part, many detailed notes about people and events during the Sikh rule and the early years of the British rule in Pothohar have been added. These notes are a synopsis of many years of verbal and written communication between Raja Kifayat Ali and Raja Muhammad Aslam. A summary of the second part of the notebook has been presented in the following table:

Type	Number of Items	Remarks
Correspondence	21	
Receipts	40	An approximate number as there are some receipts that only record minor transactions.
Court Order (Robkar)	01	From the early years of the British rule.
Application	02	
Agreement (Iqrarnama)	02	
Land Deed (Patta)	04	All from the early years of the British rule.
Miscellaneous	01	Appointment order as local officer-in-charge for transit of post from the early years of the British rule.

The transcribed documents were collectively titled as correspondence (parwanajat) by Raja Kifayat Ali Khan [1]. On closer inspection, not all of these documents can be categorized as official or personal correspondence. In the preceding tables, the different categories of documents included in both parts of the notebook have been distinctly identified. In the second part of the notebook, a large number of receipts have been included. Some of these receipts may at first glance appear to be correspondence, which in effect they are not as they clearly represent record of miscellaneous transactions i.e. payment receipt of land revenue after a harvest, record of services rendered in an official capacity, or any other sale or purchase etc.

There are some items among correspondence that record grant of jagirs and their structure and language is dissimilar to the usual style of the official correspondence followed in the Sikh era. These items could have been more suitably identified as asnads by the compiler but they were put together with ordinary correspondence and I have not attempted to categorize them separately. Two of such correspondence items regarding Gakkhars that hold considerable historical significance will be described briefly in the following paragraphs along with one other that is of general interest.

All correspondence items from the Sikh era are in Farsi, the official language of the period with the exception of two that are in Urdu. An original receipt included in the second part of the notebook was in English and it has been translated into Urdu while being transcribed (serial no. 17 in the following table). There are some correspondence items that do not have a seal imprint while a few have been signed or stamped in Gurmukhi script. Whenever a document carrying a seal imprint or signed in Gurmukhi script was transcribed, the word Gurmukhi in Urdu has been written at the top of the document in lieu of the indecipherable seal or signature. Familiarity with Gurmukhi script was not common among Muslims otherwise a translation would have been provided. The compiler was also not able to read some seal imprints as they have faded considerably due to the antiquity of the documents. In the absence of an intelligible seal or signature, it is impossible to ascribe a document to an individual without a detailed textual analysis. A list of correspondence items that are distinctly identified by the seal imprints or signatures affixed to them accompanied with necessary explanatory remarks has been included in the following table:

Sr. No.	Name	Number of Items	Remarks
1.	Sultan Muhammad Shadman Khan	02	One of the five sons of Sultan Muqarrab Khan.
2.	Sardar Chattar Singh	29	
3.	Sardar Gulab Singh	01	This is most likely Maharaja Gulab Singh prior to becoming ruler of Jammu and Kashmir. He served as administrator of Jhelum, Rohtas, and Gujrat as a functionary of the Sikh empire [7, 8]. The correspondence item is dated ca. 1837-38.
4.	Sardar Gulab Singh	03	One of the four sons of Sardar Chattar Singh.
5.	Sardar Sher Singh	04	The eldest son of Sardar Chattar Singh.
6.	Sardar Avtar Singh	03	One of the four sons of Sardar Chattar Singh.
7.	Chaudhary Shahbaz	01	
8.	Sherbaz Khan	01	The eldest son of Raja Fazalddad Khan [9].
9.	Maharaja Ranjit Singh	02	
10.	Fazalddad Khan	02	

11.	Sardar Bashan Singh	02	
12.	Duleep Singh	01	The correspondence item carries the seal imprint of Raja Tej Singh in addition to the underage Maharaja, who was a leading member of the council of regency appointed after the first Anglo-Sikh war.
13.	Misir Bhagwan Singh	02	
14.	Karam Bakhsh	01	
15.	Misir Ratanchand	01	
16.	Rahm Ali	01	
17.	(Neh) Pir Ali	01	The name is not clear. It may be an English name that was misunderstood. The original receipt is from 1849, right after the conclusion of the second Anglo-Sikh war.

At serial no. 1 in the above table, two correspondence items ascribed to Sultan Muhammad Shadman Khan have been included. Both of these items record grant of lands to different individuals. One of these documents has been shown as the photograph labeled 1 below. This particular correspondence item or more appropriately sanad from 1799 grants the proprietary rights of a village to an individual named Sher Alam Khan. Apparently, Sultan Muhammad Shadman was granted the parganah of Dangali by the Afghan king Zaman Shah Durrani (1767-1845) during one of his campaigns to subdue the Sikhs and to assert his claim to the territory of Punjab as part of the Durrani empire. But this arrangement could not have survived for long. Soon after, the Sikhs were successful in regaining their control of the Punjab and it would have become very difficult for the Gakkhar chief to keep his alliance with the Afghan king intact.

In the Kaigoharnama, the author, most likely Raizada Ratanchand, has recorded an instance in which Raja Fazaldad Khan (d. 1879), a son of Raja Nur Khan, one of the Gakkhar chiefs from the village Domeli (Sohawa) approached the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) to seek mediation in resolving an ongoing conflict with the administrator of the parganah of Rohtas. The issue was resolved through intervention of Raja Dhian Singh, the de facto prime minister of the Sikh empire, and Raja Fazaldad Khan was granted a few villages as jagir, which he retained till the end of the Sikh era [9-11]. At serial no. 9 in the above table, two correspondence items bearing the seal imprint of Maharaja Ranjit Singh have been included. These two documents from 1836-37 are in effect asnads granting Raja Fazaldad Khan the proprietary rights of seven villages in the parganah of Rohtas and a further right to collect the tribute due at the end of a harvest (mushakhsa) of a village in another area. One of these documents has been shown as the photograph labeled 2 below. During the second Anglo-Sikh war, the majority of the Gakkhars of the Jhelum region sided with the Sikhs. Raja Fazaldad Khan was no exception and in

1

شماره ۱

نقل اسناد مقبوضه سرداران لشکر

۱- اسناد لشکر شاهان متعذران حال در استقبال بزرگه و انگلی نهایت اید و از بوده بزرگه

موضه همه حال ابتدا به مصلحت ضریف بجای شجاعت شاهر شیر علی خان

معتز و مرتضی فرموده شد - باید که محمول آن جا را فصل به فصل

تأسیس و معرفت سازند - بوسیله حالکاری - حقوق دیونی کلی

خاص فرموده شد - بخری آنکه نموده شد

تحریر تباریه درم شهر شهبان الحکم ۱۲۱۳

نوشته شیر علی کی اعداد موجود اینست به لایحه

2

62

دوین

۱- اسناد لشکر شاهان عا مدان حال در استقبال قلمه ادناسی بیه دیوانه سرداران

درین وقت مورضات مفضل دین به حق به شمر از ناقله بود

و معذره رویم یک آنم ساقم از ابتدا به فصل رسیده ۱۸۹۵

به عینه درم آنکه درم در پیش در حلیه و کاری در ویم

نوبه لایحه ازیم مفضل از خان ارتقا سید از حلیه و ساقم

مکر وید - بزرگه - چینیوت - مکر وید - کمال - کمال - کمال - کمال

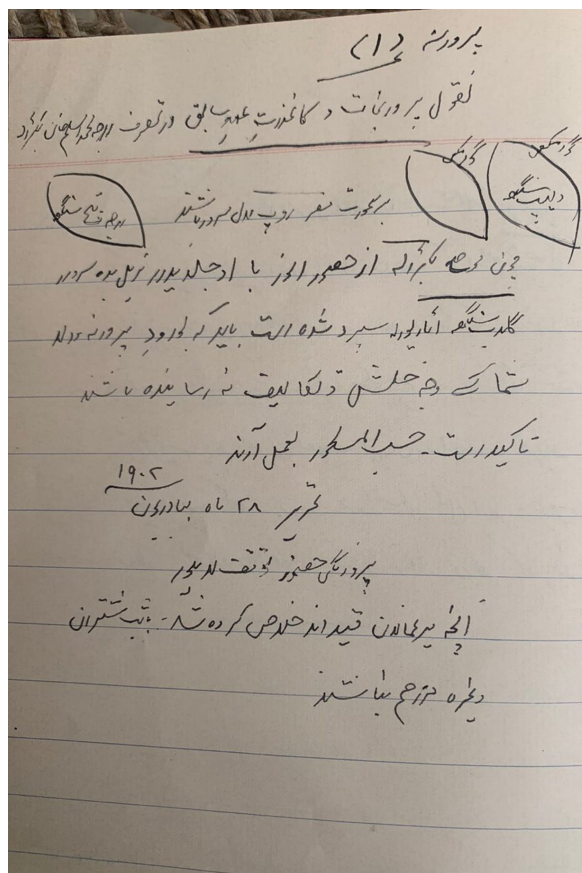
۱۷۷۶-۶۰ ۷۰۶/۴ ۲۶۳/۴ ۲۲۲/۴ ۵۳۹/۴

که شاهر از آنم مکر وید آن جا در معرفت خود آورده مدرج در کتب بار

ازینار دولت بهرکت حضور او را سرگرم نمایند تا کمال است

۳۰ ماه حلیه ۱۸۹۵

1848 he accompanied Sardar Sher Singh Attariwala to Multan and rebelled. Being on the losing side cost him dearly. He was deprived of majority of his possessions and only one fourth (chaharam) of the revenue of the village Domeli was allowed to him as subsistence allowance after the war [12].



3

Maharaja Duleep Singh, the underage son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh ascended the throne of the Sikh empire in 1843 with his mother acting as the regent. After the first Anglo-Sikh war, his mother was replaced by a council of regency appointed by the British [13]. At serial no. 12 in the preceding table, a correspondence item from 1846-47 has been included that bears the seal imprint of Maharaja Duleep Singh. This document has been shown as the photograph labeled 3 above. The content of the correspondence item points out to the addressee that as village Bakrala has been allocated to Sardar Gulab Singh Attariwala, therefore all measures should be taken to facilitate the proprietor. A postscript notes that all detainees should be freed and the addressee should not resist the disposal of camels etc. Apparently, this correspondence item has been written in the aftermath of an incident that took place at Bakrala and involved its residents who were and still are predominantly Gakkhars. The incident seems to be a local one but somehow it became serious enough to draw the attention of the members of the court of

the minor sovereign. It is pertinent to note that Sardar Gulab Singh referred to in this particular letter was a son of Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala. Sardar Chattar Singh's eldest son Sardar Sher Singh Attariwala was a member of the council of regency and it is likely that he was present at the court in Lahore at this time [13]. His presence and influence at the court may have been a reason that such a letter demanding a prompt and firm action was issued from the highest office in the realm.

The correspondence and other official record reviewed in this historical note is an extremely valuable primary source of information about the state of affairs that existed in various parts of Pothohar during the Sikh era. The items presented here are only a fraction of the collection of historical documents that was maintained by Raja Kifayat Ali Khan. The status of the rest of the collection remains uncertain.

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